



Political Pulse

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FPPC, using expedited, electronic screening, scoops up late contributors and major donors

"We may have finally found something that works," Karen Getman, chairman of the Fair Political Practices Commission, said last Monday.

Getman was expressing her pleasure at what appears to be increased compliance with disclosure rules governing major donor reports, late contributions and statements of economic interests required of state and local officials.

The FPPC has been using some streamlined, pro-active enforcement programs — with a big boost from the state's new

electronic filing laws — to identify political reform scofflaws, the companies, committees and individuals who fail to comply with the state's disclosure laws governing political activity.

The result appears to be that people are getting the word and making a greater effort to comply — which cuts down on the number of enforcement cases that build up and enables the FPPC to deal with many more cases, Getman said, "on a real time basis."

At the March 9 FPPC meeting the commission fined a total of 30 major donors for failing to file timely reports on their contributions. At the same time, another seven state and local commission members were fined from \$300 to \$2,000 for failing to file statements of economic interest with reporting agencies.

And over the last seven months the commission fined 42 donors a total of \$86,537 for failing to file late contribution reports during the 2000 primary election cycle. Those donors — who made contributions of over \$10,000 — along with another seven who failed to report smaller contributions, contributed a total of \$2.2 million to state level campaigns in the March primary cycle.

In an interview this week Getman said that contributors and their advisors expressed "a lot of shock" late last summer that the FPPC was moving so quickly on late contribution fines, many of which were levied before the November election.

But later on in the fall, Getman said, it appeared that most contributors were working harder to comply with the law, which requires virtually immediate reporting of a contribution of more than \$1,000 during the sixteen days leading up to the day of the election.

According to Getman, this "expedited" effort began in mid-1999 with an attempt to streamline the process of enforcing the filing of economic interest statements. Failure to file those reports with the FPPC or with local county clerks had regularly been spotted by the agency or reported to it, but the process of investigating and levying fines had been lagging.

Those reports are still filed on paper, but an effort has been made to handle the paperwork quickly.

As that work went along, Getman noted, the FPPC also dealt with an effort by political reform activist Tony Miller to force it to investigate major donors who failed to file, or to allow him to sue those donors as a kind of private prosecutor.

That caused the FPPC to set up a program to spot major donor violations and quickly move on them itself.

Finally, the requirement for electronic filing campaign contribution reports went into effect for most statewide offices during 2000, enabling the FPPC to track failure to file reports electronically.

"Certainly electronic filing has made it possible for us to handle this more quickly and with fewer resources," Getman said this week.

Miller agreed. He said he was "delighted" with the FPPC's efforts in this area, and felt he could claim some of the credit for pushing the commission into the program. But he noted that the law that requires electronic filing, allowing for disclosure of contribution reports on the Internet, really makes the program effective.

Some well-known names in the California political arena have made the list of late contributors who were fined for lack of timely disclosure. The biggest fine, \$8,000, was levied against Hewlett Packard. Bank of America, the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Association and the Pachenga Band of Mission Indians were each fined \$2,000 and former state Sen. Tom Hayden was fined \$1,500.

Another 11 late contributor cases are still under investigation because a close look at the facts turned up something that requires further investigation, Getman said.